

FILE COPY

SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

OCTOBER TERM, 1941

No. 144

A. J. TRISTANI, SUGAR, INC.

Plaintiff

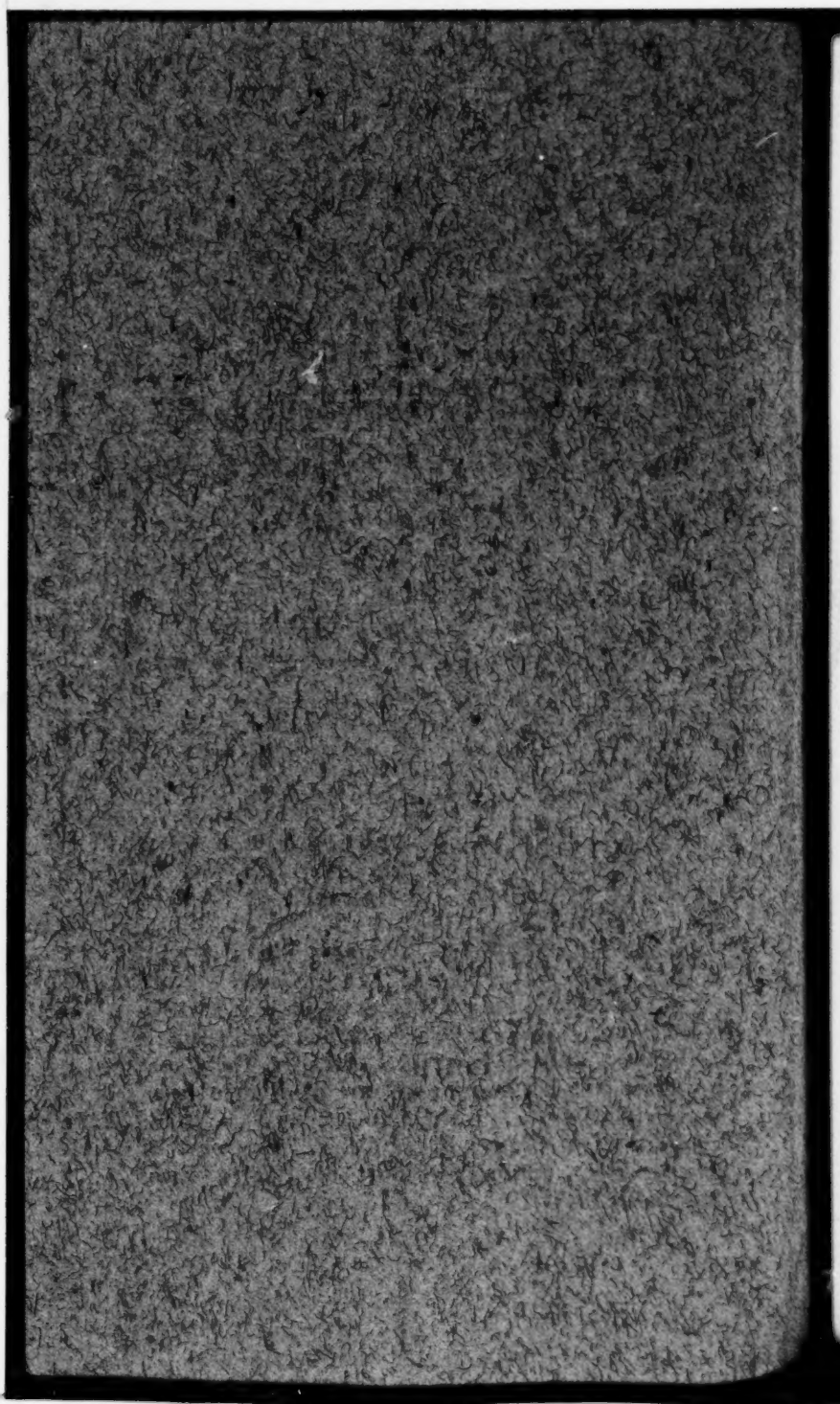
vs.

RAFAEL BUSCAGLIA, TREASURER, ET AL.

PETITION FOR WRIT OF HABEAS CORPUS TO THE
UNITED STATES CIRCUIT COURT OF APPEALS
FOR THE FIRST CIRCUIT AND BRIEF IN SUP-
PORT THEREOF.

F. FERNANDEZ CUYAR,
Counsel for Petitioner.

MARIANO ACOSTA VILAHER,
DANIEL PELLON LAFUENTE,
Of Counsel.



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SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

OCTOBER TERM, 1948

No. 144

A. J. TRISTANI, SUCRS., INC.,

Petitioner,

vs.

RAFAEL BUSCAGLIA, TREASURER, ET AL.

**PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE
UNITED STATES CIRCUIT COURT OF APPEALS,
FIRST CIRCUIT.**

*To the Honorable the Chief Justice and the Associate Jus-
tices of the Supreme Court of the United States:*

Your petitioner, A. J. Tristani Sucrs., Inc., a corporation created and organized under the Laws of Puerto Rico, prays a writ of certiorari to review the judgment of the Circuit Court of Appeals, First Circuit, entered on February 27, 1948, in the cause entitled "A. J. Tristani Sucrs., Inc. v. Rafael Buscaglia, Treasurer (No. 4272)", affirming judgment rendered by three of the five Justices of the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico.

Summary Statement

At various dates during the period June 1939 through October, 1942, petitioner imported cigarettes into Puerto Rico from Continental United States and paid the sum of \$425,623.70 into the Treasury of Puerto Rico to cover the "additional" excise taxes levied by law.¹ In 1944 and 1945 the special statutes under which petitioner was compelled to pay said "additional" excise taxes were declared unconstitutional, and therefore null and void, by the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico.² Refunds of the "additional" excise were consequently decreed by the insular Supreme Court in favor of several taxpayers.³ Several months after the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico held invalid said taxing acts, petitioner filed with the Insular Treasurer, a written claim for refund of the sums paid by it as heretofore stated (R. 7). Ten months later, petitioner was notified that its claim for refund had been refused (R. 18). Petitioner then filed its complaint in the Tax Court of Puerto Rico, seeking a decree for refund.⁴ The Tax Court dismissed the complaint for lack of jurisdiction (R. 29). On review⁵ the Insular Supreme Court reversed the ruling of

¹ The ordinary or normal excise on cigarettes has existed in the insular legislation since 1925 (Laws of Puerto Rico, 1925, p. 594). For certain purposes not here material, in 1939 the Legislative Assembly of Puerto Rico levied an "additional" excise tax on cigarettes, amounting to 50 cents on each one thousand cigarettes imported into the Island. (Laws of Puerto Rico, Special Session, 1939, page 100; amended by Act No. 149, approved May 6, 1940, Laws of Puerto Rico, 1940, page 900, and by Act No. 28 approved December 3, 1942, Laws of Puerto Rico, 2d & 3d Special Session, 1942, pages 118-120). A detailed schedule showing the various payments made, dates of such payments, whether voluntarily or under protest, and other pertinent data, is annexed to this Petition. See Appendix, p. 11.

² *Puerto Rico Tobacco Corporation v. Buscaglia, Treasurer*, 62 P. R. R. 782 (1944); and *Axon Fisher Tobacco Co. v. Buscaglia, Treasurer*, 65 P. R. R. 125 (1945).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ The procedural right to invoke the jurisdiction of the Tax Court was predicated upon two alternative grounds, viz: the provisions of an "Act

the Tax Court and held that the jurisdiction of said court was properly invoked by petitioner (R. 51). It further held that the "additional" excises paid by this petitioner had been "unlawfully collected" from it by the Treasurer (R. 47). However, a majority of the Court⁶ was of the opinion that petitioner had not used the correct or appropriate procedure to seek redress. It held that refunds could be granted only if payment was shown to have been made under protest and if complaint for refund was shown to have been filed within the time limited by the statute providing for payment of taxes under protest.⁷ Since petitioner, in making the various payments complained of, had not complied with either one or both of the requirements of the 1927 Act, the Insular Supreme Court held the right to refund totally barred. Regarding the statutes relied upon by petitioner,⁸ said court ruled that the 1904 Act

for the Repayment of Taxes Improperly Collected," approved Feb. 12, 1904 (Laws of Puerto Rico 1904, p. 182) as amended by Act No. 10, approved March 29, 1945; or the provisions of the act creating the Tax Court of Puerto Rico, approved May 15, 1943 (Laws of Puerto Rico, 1943, page 600).

⁶ Section 5 of the law creating the Tax Court of Puerto Rico provides for the review by the Supreme Court of all final judgments of the Tax Court (Laws of Puerto Rico, 1943, p. 610).

⁷ The Supreme Court of Puerto Rico is composed of a Chief Justice and four Associate Justices (48 U.S.C.A. Sec. 861; General Order No. 118, promulgated by Brigadier-General Davis, U. S. Army, on August 16, 1899). In the case at bar, only three of the five justices intervened.

⁸ The majority of the Court in *this instance* held that the only procedural legislation available for recovery of taxes unlawfully collected was found in "An Act Providing for the Payment of Taxes under Protest, etc.," approved April 19, 1927 (Laws of Puerto Rico, 1927, p. 122-126), as amended by Act No. 17, approved November 21, 1941 (Laws of Puerto Rico, Special Session, 1941, p. 54). Thirteen months later, while this case was pending decision by the Circuit Court of Appeals, the full personnel of the Insular Supreme Court decided, as here contended by petitioner, that a taxpayer can seek redress under the provisions of the Acts of 1904 and 1943. See footnote 4, *ante*. A petition for rehearing, filed in the Court below, called the attention of the Circuit Court of Appeals to this virtual reversal of opinion, but the court below refused to reconsider (R. 136, 145; 166 F. (2d) 970).

⁹ See footnote 4, *ante*.

"did not establish any right in favor of the taxpayer, or contain any provision fixing a term for the filing of an application for refund" (R. 48); and, further, with reference to the alternative ground invoked by petitioner, viz, the 1943 Act creating the Tax Court of Puerto Rico, the Insular Supreme Court held that said Act did not revive barred rights to refunds, but only conferred jurisdiction on the Tax Court "to take cognizance of cases of refund of taxes" (R. 53).

On appeal, the Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed, essentially on the ground that there was no manifest or inescapable error in the decision of the Insular Supreme Court. However, one week before the Circuit Court handed down its opinion and judgment, the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico decided the case of *Gerardino v. Tax Court of Puerto Rico*,⁹ holding that the Act of 1943 provides a judicial remedy for the recovery of excise taxes unlawfully collected, "without reference to the voluntary or involuntary nature of the payment" (R. 129). It further specifically held that under the Act of 1904 a refund could be obtained from the Treasurer of Puerto Rico if petition therefor was filed within the time limited by a 1946 amendment to said Act.¹⁰ The Insular Supreme Court pointedly stated that, after the enactment of the act creating the Tax Court of Puerto Rico (the Act of 1943), the phrase "payment under protest" lost most of its magic; that prior thereto "the failure to pay under protest meant that no

⁹ The text of this opinion shall be found at pp. 118 to 135 of the record herein.

¹⁰ It should be noted that, prior to 1946 (Act No. 261, Laws of P. R. 1946, p. 540) there was no time limitation for the filing with the Treasurer of applications for refund. The first and only legislative action directed towards fixing a time limitation occurred in 1946, as noted. Prior thereto, the Insular Legislature had implicitly recognized the fact that refunds under the Act of 1904 were being claimed and granted, and in 1945 it amended said act so as to facilitate and expedite the procedure for the obtainment of refunds (Act No. 10, Laws of P. R. 1945, p. 32).

judicial remedy existed to recover overpayments," and that "the fact that a taxpayer who pays excise taxes under protest fails thereafter to avail himself of the remedy provided by Acts Nos. 8 and 17 (the 1927 Acts) does not necessarily mean that he is also barred from utilizing the different remedy provided by par. 4 (of the Act of 1943)." ¹¹

It may not be amiss to call this Court's attention to the significant fact that the *Gerardino* decision was rendered by all the five justices of the Insular Supreme Court, while the decision in the case at bar was made by only three justices of said Court. At any rate, the *Gerardino* decision is, in substance and effect, a complete reversal of the position adopted by the insular court in this case. Such reversal of local doctrine having occurred *prior* to the decision of the appeal before the Circuit Court, it is obvious that the court below should have paid it the deference ordained by the rule as repeatedly stated by this Court. ¹²

In consequence, petitioner filed in the Court below its petition for rehearing ¹³ calling the Court's attention to the local doctrine as established in the *Gerardino* case, and including a certified copy of the opinion rendered in said case.

The Circuit Court denied rehearing on the ground that the *Gerardino* decision was distinguishable from the case at bar in that *Gerardino* paid his excise taxes *after* the Act of 1943 had become effective, while petitioner herein had made his payments of the taxes in question *before* the passage of the Act of 1943. However, the court below evidently failed to grasp the full import of the *Gerardino* decision, which definitely established the taxpayers' *two* alternative and separate remedies for refund, viz., payment under protest and action for recovery under the Act of

¹¹ R. 129.

¹² The most recent and pointed expression of this rule of deference may be found in *De Castro v. Board of Commissioners*, 322 U. S. 451 (1944).

¹³ R. 106.

1927; or payment, whether voluntary or under protest, and, within the time limitation of four years recently fixed, petition with the Treasurer for refund, and within 30 days after denial thereof, suit in the Tax Court to compel refund.¹⁴ The fact that the Circuit Court misconstrued the *Gerardino* case was made evident a short time later by several decisions of the Insular Supreme Court. In the *Mayaguez Light, Power & Ice Co. v. Tax Court of Puerto Rico* and in *Ana María Sugar Co. Inc. v. Tax Court of Puerto Rico* and in *International General Electric S. A. Inc. v. Tax Court of Puerto Rico*—all these cases decided March 31, 1948—the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico, construed and applied the Act of 1904 and held by decision of all five justices, that a taxpayer was entitled, under its provisions, to a refund of taxes paid during the years 1941, 1942, 1943 and 1944.¹⁵ It will be noted that these decisions involved refunds of payments made prior to 1943. These latest decisions of the Insular Supreme Court interpreting the local tax refund statutes, stand in direct conflict with the Circuit Court's construction, as expressed in its order denying rehearing.

Leave to file a second petition for rehearing having been granted, the attention of the Circuit Court was particularly called to these decisions of the Insular Supreme Court. Nevertheless, the Court below denied reconsideration without filing any further opinion.¹⁶

Statement of Jurisdiction

The jurisdiction of this Honorable Court is invoked under the provisions of Sec. 240 (a) of the Judicial Code of the United States, as amended by the Act of Feb. 13, 1925 C. 229,

¹⁴ R. 131-132.

¹⁵ The text of the opinion delivered in the three cases cited will be found at pp. 139 of the Record herein.

¹⁶ The order denying the second petition for rehearing was entered April 23, 1948. R. 145.

Sec. 1, 43 Stat. 938 (28 U. S. C. A. 347).

The judgment of the Circuit Court of Appeals for the First Circuit was entered on February 27, 1948, and is officially reported at 166 F. (2d) 966-970. The first petition for rehearing was denied April 9, 1948 (R. 136), and the second petition for rehearing was denied April 23, 1948 (R. 145).

Questions Presented

1. A rule long established by numerous decisions of this Court is substantially to the effect that it is the duty of a Federal appellate court¹⁷ to ascertain and apply State or territorial law in a case in which such law is controlling. A necessary corollary of this doctrine requires the reversal on appellate review of any judgment of a Federal court, ruled by local law and correctly applying that law when the judgment was rendered, if in the meantime the State or territorial courts have modified or clarified their former rulings and adopted different ones.

The primary question posed in the case at bar is whether or not the Circuit Court has decided an important question of local taxing law in a way openly in conflict with applicable local decisions. Here, the judgment of the Circuit Court was undoubtedly ruled by local law represented by the decision rendered by the Insular Supreme Court in this case. However, such "local law" was modified by that court prior to the judgment of the Federal appellate court. Therefore, at the time when such judgment was rendered, it did not apply correctly the "local law"—indeed, it was in conflict therewith.

The decision originally rendered by the Insular Supreme Court in this case held, in substance and effect, that a tax-

¹⁷ Undoubtedly the Circuit Court of Appeals is a Federal appellate court.

payer in Puerto Rico, seeking refund of taxes illegally collected from him, had only *one* remedy to enforce his right, to wit, that provided in the Act of 1927 which required payment under protest and filing of action to recover within a limited time. While the appeal taken to the Circuit Court was pending, the Insular Supreme Court reversed its ruling on this specific procedural point, and held that the taxpayer may resort to either of *two* available remedies, to wit, the procedure above outlined under the Act of 1927, or payment, either voluntary or under protest, and within four years thereafter application for refund under the provisions of the Act of 1904 to the Insular Treasurer, and, upon denial thereof, suit before the Tax Court of Puerto Rico as provided by the Act of 1943.

Inasmuch as petitioner has exercised its right to refund by following one of the two alternative procedures sanctioned by the latest ruling of the Insular Supreme Court, it is obvious that the judgment below, in denying relief, stands in open conflict with the applicable local law which, even at the time the judgment below was entered, approved of the procedure followed by this petitioner.

Such conflict was emphasized shortly thereafter by subsequent decisions of the local court. The Court below, when acquainted with the modification of local law as effected by the Insular Supreme Court, refused to recognize the change and attempted to take the case at bar out of the scope of the new doctrine by stating that the payments here sought to be recovered had been made before the passage of the Act of 1943, creating the Tax Court of Puerto Rico, while the payments involved in the decision establishing the new ruling had been made after the passage of said Act of 1943. But such distinction had by then been implicitly repudiated by the Insular Supreme Court in a line of decisions, granting refunds of taxes paid *before*

1943. When this line of decisions was brought to the attention of the Circuit Court it simply denied rehearing without opinion.

Therefore, the main question here presented is whether or not the judgment of the Circuit Court should be reversed as being in conflict with the applicable local law as construed and interpreted by the latest decisions of the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico.

Reasons Relied On for the Allowance of the Writ

This case involves the important question as to the deference that must be paid by the Circuit Court of Appeals to local decisions upon matters of purely local concern, and as to whether the Circuit Court of Appeals may superimpose its criterion and interpretation of local statutes over that given by the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico at the time of the disposition of the case by the Circuit Court; and as to whether a judgment of the Circuit Court is correct or erroneous when at the time of entering such judgment it is in conflict with the latest local decisions.

To hold, as the Circuit Court of Appeals did, that "it hardly makes sense to suppose that there co-existed another legal remedy available to taxpayers whether they paid under protest or not", and further to hold that the taxpayer in Puerto Rico has only *one* remedy for the refund of taxes illegally collected, notwithstanding the rulings of the Insular Supreme Court to the effect that such taxpayer has *two* alternative remedies to obtain tax refunds, is clearly a superimposition of criterion and a lack of the deference due to the understanding and interpretation of local taxing statutes by the highest insular court, as well as an inobservance or disregard of the long established and time honored doctrine of this Court to the effect that the decision of the highest court of a State or territory on matters of

local law is conclusive, and that the Circuit Courts of Appeals must apply and ascertain the local law as declared by the highest court of the State as of the time when the appeal is disposed of, and not as of the time when the judgment appealed from was rendered. The doctrine has been specifically applied in cases appealed to the Circuit Court of Appeals for the First Circuit from the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico. *De Castro v. Board of Commissioners*, 322 U. S. 451, 88 L. Ed. 1384.

WHEREFORE your petitioner respectfully prays that a writ of certiorari be granted herein, and that the judgment of the Circuit Court of Appeals for the First Circuit in the case at bar be reversed.

F. FERNANDEZ CUYAR,
Attorney for Petitioner.

MARIANO ACOSTA VELARDE,
DANIEL PELLON LAFUENTE,
Of Counsel.

APPENDIX "A"

That the petitioner paid the internal revenue taxes to the Treasurer of Puerto Rico, some under protest and others voluntarily, as it appears in detail hereafter, to wit:

Mdse. Date 1939	Date of Declaration 1939	Int. Rev. Invoice No.	Cartons of 10000th	Taxes Protested	Taxes Not Protested
6-23	6-23	3696	484		\$2,420
6-28	7-1	3698	418		2,090
7-5	7-11	3699	342		1,710
7-13	7-14	27301	378		1,890
7-18	7-22	27302	373		1,865
7-26	7-28	27303	333		1,665
8-2	8-8	27304	298		1,490
8-14	8-17	27306	44		220
8-15	8-17	27307	348		1,740
8-24	8-25	27308	344		1,720
8-30	8-31	27309	369		1,845
9-8	9-12	27311	364		1,820
9-15	9-21	27312	408		2,040
9-19	9-21	27314	382		1,910
9-28	10-14	27315	470		2,350
10-7	10-11	27317	894		4,470
10-21	10-30	27318	281		1,405
10-28	10-30	27319	286		1,430
11-2	11-6	27321	390		1,950
11-13	11-13	27322	400		2,000
11-18		27324	416		2,080
11-24	11-29	27325	389		1,945
11-29	11-30	27327	514		2,570
12-7	12-12	27329	449		2,245
12-13	12-18	27331	447		2,235
1940					
12-23	1-3	27332	420		2,100
12-30	1-3	27333	1283		6,415
1940					
1-19	1-25	27335	454		2,270
1-24	1-25	27337	530		2,900
2-2	2-6	27338	409		2,045
2-9	2-14	27340	514		2,570
2-17	2-26	27342	512		2,560
2-23	2-26	27343	681		3,405
3-2	3-6	27345	502		2,510
3-8	3-11	27346	512		2,560
3-15	3-25	27348	500		2,500
3-23	3-25	27349	472		2,360
3-28	4-2	18501	510		2,550
4-4	4-9	18502	514		2,570
4-10	4-11	18504	616		3,080
4-19	4-29	18506	566		2,830
4-25	4-29	18508	471		2,355
5-6	5-7	18511	494		2,470
5-9	5-14	18512	536		2,680
5-17	5-27	18513	573		2,865

Mdse. Date	Date of Declaration	Int. Rev. Invoice No.	Cartons of 10000th	Taxes Protested	Taxes Not Protested
1939	1939				
5-25	5-27	18515	573		\$2,865
5-29	6-5	18516	506		2,530
6-5	6-14	18519	514		2,570
6-12	6-14	18520	510		2,550
6-20	6-28	18522	503		2,515
6-27	6-28	18523	404		2,020
7-3	7-12	18527	520		2,600
7-11	7-12	18529	544		2,720
7-18	7-18	18531	468		2,340
7-24	7-29	18532	490		2,450
8-1	8-5	18534	430		2,150
8-7	8-17	18536	372		1,860
8-16	8-19	18538	365		1,825
8-22	8-23	18539	402		2,010
8-29	9-3	18541	453		2,265
9-7	9-17	18544	512		2,500
9-12	9-18	18545	495		2,475
9-21	9-23	18547	480		2,400
9-26	9-30	18548	509		2,995
10-3	10-10	18550	488		2,440
10-10	10-19	4801	408	\$2,040	
10-17	10-19	4803	464	2,320	
10-25	10-29	4804	464	2,320	
11-1	11-8	4806	539	2,695	
11-9	11-18	4810	458	2,290	
11-14	11-18	4811	490	2,450	
11-24	11-25	4814	424	2,120	
11-30	12-6	4817	470		2,350
12-5	12-6	4818	584		2,920
12-15	12-23	4820	470		2,350
12-20	12-23	4821	464		2,320
12-27	12-30	4823	635		3,175
1941	1941				
1-5	1-21	4826	494		2,470
1-9	1-21	4827	1003		5,015
1-22	1-23	4829	643		3,215
1-31	2-4	4830	514		2,570
2-6	2-10	4833	519		2,595
2-16	2-17	4836	539		2,695
2-22	2-24	4837	589		2,945
2-28	3-3	4829	524		2,620
3-7	3-10	4842	587		2,935
3-14	3-17	4844	555		2,775
3-21	2-24(sic)	4846	556		2,780
3-28	4-1	4848	549		2,745
4-4	4-8	4849	561		2,805
4-12	4-14	1003	638		3,190
4-21	4-24	1005	508		2,540
4-26	4-28	1007	574		2,870
5-2	5-5	1008	714		3,570
5-10	5-14	1010	644		3,220
5-17	5-21	1013	414		2,070
5-24	5-26	1015	479		2,395
5-28	5-31	1017	594		2,970
6-6	6-10	1022	557		2,785
6-12	6-18	1024	544		2,720
6-21	6-26	1026	574		2,870

Mdse. Date	Date of Declaration	Int. Rev. Invoice No.	Cartons of 10000th	Taxes Protested	Taxes Not Protested
1939	1939				
6-28	6-30	1029	572		2,860
7-5	7-10	1030	495		2,475
7-11	7-14	1032	579		2,395
7-18	7-21	1034	569		2,845
7-26	7-30	1038	531		2,655
7-30	8-1	1039	543		2,715
8-10	8-13	1041	1356(13547.4-M)		6,773.70
8-31	9-3	1046	569		2,845

Mdse. Date	Date of Declaration	Int. Rev. Invoice No.	Cartons of 10000th	Taxes Protested	Taxes Not Protested
1941	1941				
9-6	9-8	1049	634		\$3,170
9-8	9-15	1050	10		50
9-11	9-15	14251	619		3,095
9-17	9-20	14253	694	\$3,470	
9-26	9-20(sic)	14254	455	2,275	
10-2	10-8	14255	424	2,120	
10-10	10-15	14258	444	2,220	
10-16	10-22	14260	301	1,505	
10-25	10-30	14261	489	2,445	
10-31	11-3	14263	680	3,400	
11-7	11-10	14264	514	2,570	
11-14	11-17	14267	594	2,970	
11-22	11-24	14268	529	2,645	
11-29	12-5	14271	599	2,995	
12-6	12-9	14272	594	2,970	
12-16	12-18	14275	560	2,785(5570th)	
12-22	12-23	14278	544	2,720	
12-30	12-31	14281	1454	7,270	

1942	1942				
1-5	1-7	14282	135	675	
1-19	1-23	14284	534	2,670	
1-22	1-26	14285	814	4,070	
2-7	2-9	14288	631	3,155	
2-9	2-18	14289	634	3,170	
2-17	2-18	14291	649	3,245	
2-27	3-4	14294	599	2,995	
3-14	3-16	14298	1268	6,340	
3-27	3-31	14299	1004	5,020	
3-31	4-9	2451	529	2,645	
4-6	4-9	2452	244	1,220	
4-13	4-15	2453	1303	6,515	
4-22	4-24	2455	500	2,500	
4-22	4-24	2456	150	750	
5-2	5-5	2458	1444	7,220	
5-24	5-28	2459	2745	13,725	
5-26	5-28	2462	893	4,465	
6-1	6-10	2463	800	4,000	
6-24	6-30	2465	724	3,620	
6-29	6-30	2467	600	2,000	
8-14	8-27	2470	650		3,250
9-22	9-30	2472	573		2,865
10-4	10-9	2473	2043		10,215
			85,129	\$141,595	\$294,028.70

RECAPITULATION

Excise taxes paid under protest.....	\$141,595.00
Excise taxes paid not under protest.....	284,028.70

APPENDIX "B"

Laws of Puerto Rico:

Act approved February 12, 1904 (An Act for the Repayment of Taxes Improperly Collected):

SECTION 1.—Whenever it is found, either upon the application of any taxpayer satisfactory to the Treasurer of Porto Rico, or by the Auditor or Treasurer upon the revision and correction of the tax receipts, that any moneys have been collected by the Treasurer of Porto Rico improperly, or in excess of the proper amount, upon the approval of the Governor, the Auditor of Porto Rico is hereby authorized to issue a settlement warrant in favor of the taxpayer for the amount of such excess of the amount improperly paid.

Act No. 10, approved March 29, 1945, amending Act of 1904:

SECTION 1.—Section 1 of the Act entitled "An Act for the repayment of taxes improperly collected," approved February 12, 1904, is hereby amended to read as follows:

"SECTION 1. Whenever it is found, either upon the application of a taxpayer to the satisfaction of the Treasurer of Puerto Rico, or upon investigation by the Auditor or Treasurer upon making the revision and correction of the tax receipts, that any moneys have been collected by the Treasurer of Puerto Rico improperly, or in excess of the proper amount, the Auditor of Puerto Rico is hereby authorized to issue a settlement warrant in favor of the taxpayer for the amount of such excess or the amount improperly paid."

Act No. 261, approved April 3, 1946; amending Act of 1904:

SECTION 1.—Section 1 of Act entitled “An Act for the repayment of taxes improperly collected,” approved February 12, 1904, as amended by Act No. 10, approved March 29, 1945, is hereby amended to read as follows:

“SECTION 1.—Whenever it is found, either upon the application of a taxpayer to the satisfaction of the Treasurer, or upon investigation by the Auditor or Treasurer upon making the revision and correction of the tax receipts, that any moneys have been collected by the Treasurer of Puerto Rico improperly, or in excess of the proper amount, the Auditor is hereby authorized to issue, with the approval of the Treasurer, a settlement warrant in favor of the taxpayer for the amount of such excess or the amount improperly paid; *Provided*, That repayment of taxes improperly collected, or in excess of the proper amount, shall not be granted after four (4) years have elapsed since the payment or [sic] said taxes, unless before the expiration of the said four (4) years, the taxpayer requests in writing from the Treasurer the repayment thereof.”

Act No. 169, approved May 15, 1943:

SECTION 4.—The Tax Court shall have exclusive jurisdiction to take cognizance of all cases of revision of the assessment or reassessment of personal property, tangible or intangible, or of real property, and of all actions, proceedings, special or extraordinary remedies, and claims of any kind, relating to or affecting the levying, collection, payment, return, or reimbursement of all kinds of taxes, including excise and income taxes, the Victory Tax, inheritance and license taxes, and any other taxes or imposts, as well as to take cognizance of taxes improperly paid, or paid in excess, or unlawfully collected, the return of which may have been refused by the Treasurer. This jurisdiction,

however, cannot be pleaded before the court by any person until there has been a proper administrative decision in the matter on the part of the Treasurer of Puerto Rico, according to law.

Act No. 8, approved April 19, 1927 :

SECTION 1.—Whenever a taxpayer believes that he should not pay any tax or part thereof, he shall, however, be obliged to pay the same in full upon request of the collector of internal revenue of his district, or of the official in charge of the collection of taxes, and shall he desire to make any claim, shall ask the said collector or the said official in charge of the collection of taxes, on making payment, to endorse the tax receipt, specifically stating whether the said protest refers to the whole or to a part of the tax paid under protest, and setting forth the exact amount protested. The said endorsement shall be signed by the taxpayer and by the collector or officer in charge of the collection of taxes.

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SECTION 3.—A taxpayer who shall have paid under protest the whole or part of any tax may, within the term of one year from the date of payment, sue the Treasurer of Porto Rico in an insular court of competent jurisdiction, or in the District Court of the United States for Porto Rico, to secure the return of the amount protested. The Attorney General shall represent the Treasurer of Porto Rico in such suits. Upon the filing of the complaint, if it be filed in an insular court, it shall follow the procedure, conditions and requirements provided by the Code of Civil Procedure in an ordinary action. When the case is ready for trial, the court shall fix the day for the trial thereof, on petition of any of the parties, with preference to any other matter pending before it. When final decision is rendered, if favorable to the taxpayer, the Treasurer of Porto Rico shall proceed to return to him the amount directed in the decision, to be charged against any fund in the

Treasury not otherwise appropriated plus interest on such amount at the rate of six (6) per cent per annum, computed from the date of the filing of the complaint in the court or on the petition of the taxpayer, the Treasurer shall credit him with the total amount to be returned, to be applied to the payment of any tax already due and unpaid or to become due in the future; *Provided*, That said credit may be transferred by the taxpayer, and then the Treasurer of Porto Rico shall credit it to the assignees, for all purposes of the law. Costs, expenses and attorney's fees shall be imposed in the discretion of the court in the same manner as in all other civil cases.

SECTION 4.—Any party may take an appeal in accordance with the provisions of the law for appeals in civil cases.

SECTION 5.—Any taxpayer filing a claim against the Treasurer of Porto Rico in accordance with the provisions of this Act, shall attach to the said claim the receipt for the tax paid under protest or a certified copy thereof.

Act No. 17, approved November 21, 1941:

SECTION 1.—Section 1 of Act No. 8, of April 19, 1927, entitled "An Act providing for the payment of taxes under protest; establishing a procedure to authorize the collection and return thereof; to repeal Act No. 9 of June 23, 1924, and Act No. 84, approved August 20, 1925, and for other purposes," is hereby amended to read as follows:

"SECTION 1.—Whenever a taxpayer believes that he should not pay any tax or part thereof, with the exception of property, inheritance, and income taxes, for the payment of which there is a specific procedure in the corresponding laws, the taxpayer shall, however, be obliged to pay the same in full upon request of the collector of internal revenue of his district or of the official in charge of the collection of taxes, and should he desire

to make any claim, he shall ask the said collector or the said official in charge of the collection of taxes, on making payment, to endorse the tax receipts, specifically stating what part of the tax is paid under protest and challenged by the taxpayer and the reasons on which he grounds the protest and challenge. The said endorsement shall be signed by the taxpayer and by the collector or officer in charge of the collection of taxes."

SECTION 2. Section 3 of the said Act No. 8 of April 19, 1927, is hereby amended to read as follows:

"SECTION 3.—A taxpayer who, in accordance with this Act and the exceptions established therein, shall have paid under protest the whole or part of any tax may, within the term of thirty (30) days from the date of payment, file a sworn complaint against the Treasurer of Puerto Rico in the corresponding district court; *Provided*, That the complaint shall not be for an amount or on any other grounds than those alleged in his protest when making payment. The Attorney General shall represent the Treasurer of Puerto Rico in such suits. Upon the filing of the complaint, if it be filed in an insular court, it shall follow the procedure, conditions, and requirements provided by the Code of Civil Procedure in an ordinary action. When the case is ready for trial, the court shall fix the day for the trial thereof, on petition of any of the parties, with preference over any other matter pending before it. When final judgment is rendered, if favorable to the taxpayer, the Treasurer of Puerto Rico shall proceed to return to him the amount directed in the judgment, to be charged against any funds available in the public treasury, plus interest on such amount at the rate of six (6) per cent per annum, computed from the date of the filing of the complaint in the court; or on the petition of the taxpayer, the Treasurer shall credit him with the total amount to be returned, to be applied to the payment of any tax already due and unpaid or to become due in the future; *Provided*, That said credit may be transferred by the taxpayer, and then the Treasurer of Puerto Rico

shall credit it to the assignees, for all the purposes of law. Costs, expenses, and attorney's fees shall be imposed in the discretion of the court in the same manner as in all other civil cases."

SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

OCTOBER TERM, 1948

No. 144

A. J. TRISTANI, SUCRS., INC.,

Petitioner,

vs.

RAFAEL BUSCAGLIA, TREASURER, ET AL.

**BRIEF IN SUPPORT OF PETITION FOR WRIT OF
CERTIORARI**

Opinions Below

The opinion rendered, on June 17, 1946, by the Tax Court of Puerto Rico, dismissing the complaint for lack of jurisdiction, is transcribed at (R. 29). The opinion of the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico rendered by three of its five justices, on January 27, 1947, holding that the Tax Court had jurisdiction (R. 51) and that the excises paid by the petitioner had been "unlawfully collected" from it (R. 47) but dismissing the complaint on the ground that the petitioner had not used the correct or adequate procedure since the *only* remedy available for the refunding of taxes illegally collected was the payment under protest and action within the time specified by Act No. 8—1927 is found at (R. 45-55). The opinion of the Circuit Court of Appeals for the First Circuit rendered on February 27, 1948, holding that "it hardly makes sense to suppose

that there co-existed another legal remedy available to taxpayers whether they paid under protest or not" (R. 105) is reported at 166 Fed. (2) 966 and will be found, also, at (R. 99-106). The opinion of the Circuit Court rendered on April 9, 1948, denying petition for rehearing is reported at 166 F. (2) 970. The order denying the second petition for rehearing will be found at (R. 145) and at 166 F. (2) 966.

Jurisdiction

The jurisdiction of this Honorable Court is invoked under Section 240 (a) of the Judicial Code of the United States, as amended by the Act of February 13, 1925 C, 229, Sect. 1, 43 Stat. 938 (28 U. S. C. A. 347).

The judgment of the Circuit Court of Appeals for the First Circuit was entered on February 27, 1948, and is officially reported at 166 F. (2) 966-970. The first petition for rehearing was denied April 9, 1948 (R. 136), and the second petition for rehearing was denied April 23, 1948 (R. 145).

Statement

A statement of the case is in the Petition (*ante*, pp. 2-6).

Specification of Errors to Be Urged

These are indicated under the heading "Questions Presented", in the Petition (*ante*, pp. 7-9).

Argument

The petitioner was clearly entitled to have its case ruled by the latest settled adjudication of the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico. Denial of such right on matters of local law is a flagrant disregard of the constant admonitions of this Honorable Court as to the deference due to the understanding of matters of local law expressed in the judgments of the highest insular courts. (*De Castro v. Board of Commissioners*, 322 U. S. 451; 88 L. Ed. 1384).

The judgment of the Circuit Court of Appeals for the First Circuit decided important questions of local law in conflict with the latest decisions of the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico.

(A) Important Questions of Local Law.

The petitioner contends that the case at bar involves the following important local questions:

1. Has the taxpayer in Puerto Rico only *one* remedy to obtain the refund of taxes illegally collected from him, as decided by the Circuit Court of Appeals in the case at bar, or has he *two* distinct and separate remedies as ruled by the latest decisions of the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico?

2. Has the taxpayer in Puerto Rico the right to obtain a refund of taxes illegally collected from him only and if said taxes have been paid under protest, as decided by the Circuit Court in the case at bar, or has the taxpayer the right to obtain a refund without reference to the voluntary or involuntary nature of the payment, as ruled by the latest decision of the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico?

3. Has the taxpayer in Puerto Rico the right to obtain a refund of taxes illegally collected from him only and if those taxes were paid after the approval of the law creating the Tax Court (Law 169 of 1943), as decided by the Circuit Court in the case at bar, or has the taxpayer the right to obtain a refund of taxes illegally collected from him prior to the approval of the said act creating the Tax Court, as ruled by the latest decisions of the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico?

The petitioner at various dates from June 1939 through October 1942 paid into the Treasury of Puerto Rico, as excise taxes, the sum of \$425,623.70. In 1944 and 1945 the special statutes under which the excises were paid were

declared null and void by the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico.¹ On October 11, 1944, the petitioner "relying on the provisions of the Act approved February 12, 1904 and Act 169 of 1943, relating to the refund of moneys improperly collected, requested the Treasurer of Puerto Rico to refund the total sum paid".² The Treasurer denied the refund, and petitioner filed suit in the Tax Court of Puerto Rico. The complaint was dismissed for lack of jurisdiction. Thereupon, the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico granted certiorari to review the judgment of the Tax Court.

On January 29, 1947, three of the five justices of the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico ruled "that the Tax Court has jurisdiction" (R. 51), and that "the excise taxes sought to be recovered were unlawfully collected by the Treasurer of Puerto Rico" (R. 47), and further held "that the Act of February 12, 1904, authorizing the refund of taxes illegally collected³ does not establish any right in favor of the taxpayer or contain any provision fixing a term for the filing of an application for refund (R. 48). The Supreme Court, however, denied relief on the ground that the only remedy of a taxpayer to obtain a refund of taxes illegally collected is that provided by Act No. 8 of April 19, 1927,⁴ and its amendment by Act No. 17 of November 21, 1941,⁵ and further ruling that although petitioner may be entitled to the refund,⁶ if it fails to exercise its right utilizing the specific procedure established in the Act of 1927, and within time limited therein, "the right to obtain

¹ *Puerto Rico Tobacco Corporation v. Treasurer*, 62 P. R. R. 782 (1944); *Aston Fisher Tobacco Co. v. Buscaglia*, 65 P.R.R. 125 (1945).

² Opinion of the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico, R. 45, line 8.

³ Appendix (p. 14).

⁴ Appendix (p. 16).

⁵ Appendix (p. 17).

⁶ It will be noted that in its Opinion, the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico specifically stated: "whereas in the present case, the taxpayer, notwithstanding his being entitled to the refund" (R. 54, line 15).

a refund is barred" (R. 54). On appeal, the Circuit Court affirmed, essentially on the ground that no manifest or inescapable error was committed by the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico. As to the contention of the petitioner, asserted in all the courts below, that no right was predicated under the Act of 1927,⁷ providing for the payment of taxes under protest, but that petitioner was proceeding in accordance with the alternative and separate remedy provided by the Act of 1904⁸ as implemented by the Act of 1943,⁹ the Circuit Court held that "it hardly makes sense to suppose that there co-existed another legal remedy available to taxpayers whether they paid under protest or not" (R. 105, lines 1-3). However, one week before the Circuit Court rendered its judgment, the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico decided that the Act of 1943 provides a judicial remedy to obtain refunds of excise taxes illegally collected "*without reference to the voluntary or involuntary nature of the payment*" (R. 129).¹⁰ It also ruled that under the Act of 1904, a refund could be obtained if application to the Treasurer was made within the time limited by the amendment to said Act,¹¹ and if, on the refusal of the Treasurer to refund, suit was brought before the Tax Court. The Supreme Court further held that after the approval of the Act of 1943, "the phrase 'payment under protest' lost most of its magic"¹² and

⁷ Appendix (p. 16).

⁸ Appendix (p. 14).

⁹ Appendix (p. 15).

¹⁰ Opinion of the Supreme Court of P. R. in the case of *Gerardino v. Tax Court*, R. 118-135.

¹¹ Prior to 1946 (Act No. 261, Laws of P. R. 1946, p. 540 there was no time limitation for the filing of applications for refund under the 1904 Act. See also opinion of the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico (R. 48). The amendment made by Act No. 10 Laws of P. R. 1945, p. 32 facilitates the procedure for obtaining refunds without limiting the time for making the application.

¹² R. p. 129, line 20.

that "Prior thereto the failure to pay under protest meant that no judicial remedy existed to recover overpayments",¹³ but that par. 4 of the Act of 1943 provides for refund suits "without reference to the voluntary or involuntary nature of the payment" (R. 129), and that "the fact that a taxpayer who pays taxes under protest fails thereafter to avail himself of the remedy provided by Acts Nos. 8 and 17 does not necessarily mean that he is also barred from utilizing the different remedy provided by par. 4" (R. 129).¹⁴

The rule thus adopted was unanimously approved by the five justices of the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico, while the opinion in the case at bar was rendered by only three of its five justices. In the *Gerardino* case¹⁵ the court unanimously ruled, in reference to the Act of 1943, that the Legislature "In 1943 it therefore created a judicial remedy for refund of overpayment of all types of taxes which had not hitherto existed" . . . (R. 120, lines 19 and 20), and clearly stated that:

"The Legislature chose in par. 4 to authorize suits for refund of overpayment of taxes in broad and comprehensive language. We find nothing in that language limiting this remedy to cases where no other remedy exists. On the contrary, we have in other situations permitted suits under par. 4 where the taxpayer had failed to take advantage of other remedies available to him" (R. 128, lines 23-29).

"And we agree with the Tax Court to the extent that it found available to the taxpayer in an excise tax

¹³ R. p. 129, Line 22.

¹⁴ In referring to "Acts Nos. 8 and 17," the Supreme Court of P. R. was alluding to the Act of 1927 (which is number 8 of that year. See Appendix 16, *infra*, and to its amendatory act (which is number 17 of 1941. See Appendix 17, *infra*).

¹⁵ See footnote 10, *ante*.

case *two remedies*: (1) Acts Nos. 8 and 17, read together with par. 5 of Section 3 of Act No. 169; (2) par. 4 of section 3 of Act No. 169" (R. 128, lines 35-39).

A motion for rehearing filed by petitioner in the Court below called the attention of said court to the decision rendered by the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico in the *Gerardino* case, and specifically to the local rule therein adopted that in Puerto Rico the taxpayer has *two* alternative and separate remedies for the recovery of excise taxes illegally collected. The Circuit Court, in denying the petition for rehearing, disregarded the holding of the Insular Supreme Court without paying to it the deference ordained by the rule repeatedly and constantly stated by this Court, among other cases in *De Castro v. Board of Commissioners*, 322 U. S. 451 (1944) 88 Law Ed. 1385.

The Supreme Court of Puerto Rico in the *Gerardino* case, definitely established that in Puerto Rico the taxpayer has *two* alternative and separate remedies for the recovery of excise taxes illegally collected, but the Circuit Court in denying rehearing, in effect imposed its criterion over that of the highest insular court by attempting to distinguish the case at bar from the *Gerardino* decision, basing the distinction on the fact that petitioner paid the excise taxes *prior* to the approval of the Act of 1943, while *Gerardino* paid his excises *after* said Act became effective. Such distinction, in itself insubstantial was actually shown to be so shortly thereafter. Several unanimous decisions of the Insular Supreme Court in cases which were pending precisely at the time rehearing herein was denied by the court below construed and applied the Acts of 1904 and of 1943, in the sense that taxpayers are entitled to a refund of taxes paid during the years 1941, 1942, 1943 and 1944, although such taxes were voluntarily paid, if application

for refund was made to the Treasurer within four years after payment.¹⁶

It is obvious, therefore, that the general rule established in the *Gerardino* case, authorizing *two* alternative remedies for the recovery of taxes illegally collected, was not restricted, qualified or limited to cases where the taxes sought to be recovered had been paid after the passage of the Act of 1943.

In consequence, again the attention of the Circuit Court was called to the extent and scope of the local doctrine as established by the Insular Supreme Court in its most recent construction of the local taxing statutes. A second petition for rehearing filed with leave of court and including a certified copy of the Insular Supreme Court's opinion in the three cases already referred to, was denied without opinion by the court below,¹⁷ even though manifestly the judgment rendered by the Circuit Court stands in open conflict with the latest local doctrine as established authoritatively by the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico.

The conflict is obvious. Here, the taxes sought to be recovered were paid prior to the passage of the Act of 1943. The Supreme Court of Puerto Rico, by judgment of three of its justices held that *the only remedy* available to petitioner for recovery was that provided by the Act of 1927. An appeal was taken to the Circuit Court, and while the appeal was pending decision, the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico modified its own doctrine in the matter, and by several unanimous decisions held that there are in Puerto Rico *two* available remedies for the recovery of taxes unlawfully collected, viz, the procedure established in the Act of 1927,

¹⁶See the opinion of the *Mayaguez Light, Power and Ice Co. v. Tax Court of Puerto Rico*; *Ana Maria Sugar Co. Inc. v. Tax Court of P. R.* and of *International General Electric S. A. Inc. v. Tax Court of P. R.*, decided on March 31, 1948 (R. 139-144).

¹⁷ The second petition for rehearing was denied April 23, 1948 (R. 145).

and the procedure established in the Act of 1904, as implemented by the Act of 1943.

Such modification of the rule by which this case was decided, has definite implications inasmuch as petitioner herein adopted and followed precisely the procedure (under the Acts of 1904 and 1943) which was eventually sanctioned as correct by the Insular Supreme Court.

Therefore, the question of law posed by the present application for certiorari to the Circuit Court is, actually, whether the Circuit Court should have decided this case in accordance with the local law as prevailing at the time the Insular Supreme Court rendered its judgment, or, rather, whether the Circuit Court should have decided this case in accordance with the local law as prevailing at the time the judgment on appeal was rendered.

Petitioner respectfully submits that, in failing to apply the local law as prevalent at the time the appeal was disposed of, the Circuit Court of Appeals committed manifest reversible error by deciding an important question of local law in a way openly in conflict with applicable local decisions. Further, in so acting, the Circuit Court has ignored or disregarded a rule long-established by numerous decisions of this Court.

As far back to the year 1892 this Honorable Supreme Court in the case of *Stutsman County v. Wallace*, 142 U. S. 293, 35 L. Ed. 1018 ruled that when pending an appeal from a territorial court to the United States Supreme Court upon a question of local law,—the territory is admitted as a State, and the Supreme Court thereof, in *another* case, reaches an opposite conclusion upon the same question, the latter decision will be followed by the Supreme Court of the United States.

In the year 1899 the same doctrine was affirmed by this Honorable Supreme Court in *Wade v. Travis County, Tex.*, 174 U. S. 499; 43 L. Ed. 1060 (1899) by holding that the

laws of a State, which the courts of United States are required to follow as rule of decisions, are to be determined by the *latest* settled adjudications of the highest court of the State, rather than by earlier cases, where there is any inconsistency between them, and that in case a construction has been placed on a State law by its highest Court, the Supreme Court, in passing upon the case in review, will apply the law as determined by *the subsequent* holding of the State court.

In *Patterson v. Alabama*, 294 U. S. 600; 79 L. Ed. 1082 at pages 1085-1086 decided in 1935 the rule was affirmed with this holding:

"We have frequently held that in the exercise of our appellate jurisdiction we have power not only to correct error in the judgment under review but to make such disposition of the case as justice requires. And in determining what justice does require, the Court is bound to consider any change, either in fact or in law, which has supervened since the judgment was entered. We may recognize such a change, which may affect the result, by setting aside the judgment and remanding the case so that the state court may be free to act. We have said that to do this is not to review, in any proper sense of the term, the decision of the state court upon a nonfederal question, but only to deal appropriately with a matter arising since its judgment and having a bearing upon the right disposition of the case."

In 1938 the doctrine as to the deference due to the local law, was once more affirmed, by this Supreme Court, in the case of *Erie R. Co. v. Tompkins*, 304 U. S. 64-92; 82 L. Ed. 1189 at pages 1192 and 1195 where it was held:

"Except in matters governed by the Federal Constitution or by Acts of Congress, the law to be applied in

any case is the law of the State. And whether the law of the State shall be declared by its Legislature in a statute or by its highest court in a decision is not a matter of federal concern."

"Supervision over either the legislative or the judicial action of the States is in no case permissible except as to matters by the Constitution specially authorized or delegated to the United States. Any interference with either, except as thus permitted, is an invasion of the authority of the State and, to that extent, a denial of its independence."

In the year 1941, this Honorable Court had again occasion to pass upon the question as to the duty of the federal courts to follow state court decisions rendered pending appeal from judgment of lower courts. In *Vandenbark v. Owens-Illinois Glass Co.*, 311 U. S. 538-543 (1941); 85 L. ed. 327 the doctrine that state decisions *at the time* of disposition of the case on appeal control, was once more affirmed. From the head note of the case we quote:

"A Circuit Court of Appeals, upon appeal from a judgment of a District Court dismissing a tort action, must apply the state law declared by the highest court of the state as of the time when the appeal is disposed of, not as of the time when the judgment below was entered, and, where the decisions of the state court relied upon by the District Court in dismissing the action have since been reversed or overruled, the Circuit Court of Appeals, in conformity therewith, should reverse the judgment of the District Court."

The petitioner contends that after the decision of the case at bar, the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico has ruled unanimously to be the local law that the taxpayer has in Puerto Rico *two* alternative and separate remedies for the recovery of excise taxes unlawfully collected. Although

the *Gerardino* case is clear and definite, the Circuit Court by denying the petition for rehearing failed to grasp the full meaning of the local ruling.

On March 31, 1948, the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico, rendered decisions in the cases of *The Mayaguez Light, Power and Ice Co., Inc. v. Tax Court*; *Ana Maria Sugar Co., Inc. v. Tax Court* and *International General Electric S. A., Inc. v. Tax Court*, thereby affirming the *Gerardino* case, *supra*, as to the two separate available remedies of taxpayers in Puerto Rico to recover taxes illegally collected. The said three decisions, unanimously rendered by the five justices of the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico, clearly ruled that a taxpayer may recover taxes paid prior to the approval of the 1943 Act. Thus, the distinction on which the Circuit Court based its refusal to adjust its judgment to the latest local interpretation was repudiated by the Insular Supreme Court itself. In *Vandenbark v. Owens-Illinois Glass Co.*, 311 U. S. 538-543 (1941) this Honorable Court cites with approval *Oklahoma Packing Co. v. Oklahoma Gas and E. Co.*, 309 U. S. 4-8; 84 L. Ed. 537-540, and states:

"In *Oklahoma Packing Co. v. Oklahoma Gas and E. Co.* we applied as *determinative* a state decision, clarifying the local law, handed down after the decree then under consideration here."

In the year 1944 this Honorable Supreme Court decided the case of *Huddleston v. Dwyer*, 322 U. S. 232-238; 88 L. ed. 1246; holding at page 1249:

"State law is the controlling rule of decision in this case as to both substantive and procedural rights of the parties. *Erie R. Co. v. Tompkins*, 304 U. S. 64, 82 L. ed. 1188, 58 S. Ct. 817, 114 ALR 1487, Federal Rules

of Civil Procedure, Rules 69(a), 81(b), 28 USCA following § 723(c), 8 FCA 1937 ed title 28, Appx. 3, pp. 741, 747. It is the duty of the federal appellate courts, as well as the trial court, to ascertain and apply the state law where, as in this case, it controls decision. *Meredith v. Winter Haven*, 320 US 228, ante, 9, 64 S. Ct. 7. And a judgment of a federal court ruled by state law and correctly applying that law as authoritatively declared by the state courts when the judgment was rendered, must be reversed on appellate review if in the meantime the state courts have disapproved of their former rulings and adopted different ones. 'Until such time as the case is no longer sub judice, the duty rests upon federal courts to apply state law under the Rules of Decision statute in accordance with the then controlling decision of the highest state court.' *Vandenbark v. Owens-Illinois Glass Co.*, 311 U. S. 538, 543 85 L. ed. 327, 330, 61 S. Ct. 347."

The doctrine that state decisions at time of disposition on appeal control, as established in the line of cases above cited, is applicable with more force in dealing with decisions of the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico where, as in the case at bar, the only question involved is a matter of local law.

It has been repeatedly ruled by this Honorable Court that deference must be paid to the understanding of the local courts upon matters of purely local concern, specially in dealing with the decisions of the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico brought up with a system different from that prevailing in continental United States. (*De Castro v. Board of Commissioners*, 322 U. S. 465 (1944).)

Conclusion

The decision of the Circuit Court of Appeals was wrong and should be reversed as being in conflict with applicable local decisions at the time of the disposition of the case

on appeal. And in view of the seriousness of the conflict, the question here presented should be settled by this Court.

It is, therefore, earnestly requested that the writ of certiorari be granted.

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DANIEL PELLON, JR.,
MARIANO ACOSTA VELARDE,
Of Counsel.

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